The Story of Shakuni

Dressed in black clothes, sporting a white beard, wearing a half-*kireetam*, rubbing dice in his hands often, limping slightly while walking, we notice a short middle aged portraying the role of *Shakuni* in movies. Shakuni Soubala, was a prince of Gandhar (now Kandahar which is a town in Afghanistan).

The cheating gambler and villain of Mahabharata is the brother of Gandhari. Fond of his nephew Duryodhana, he won the kingdom of Pandavas in the game of dice. Shakuni is one of the four most wicked men of Mahabharatha with others that includes Duryodhana, Dushyansana and Karna.

There is a story that the dice he used was made out of his father's thigh bones Gandhari had some problem in her astrological chart which indicated that her second husband only will survive. To come over this problem, she was first married to a goat and then the animal was mutilated, so she became a widow before marrying Dhritharashtra. Duryodhana, when he took charge of the Hastinapura, was insulted by Bheema that he is son of a widow. Raged with this insult, he learnt about the story, conquered Gandhara Desha and imprisoned his 100 uncles including Shakuni.

He arranged to provide one handful of rice for all of them to eat everyday. It was decided by the Subala, the father that Shakuni will eat the food given and survive to destroy Kouravas. There is also an other story about how the Gandhara King assessed the intelligence of his sons to select a brilliant one. He asked his sons who were all in the prison to insert a thread through a bone so that who ever does is it can eat the fistful of rice and survive to take revenge. All the sons attempted and failed but Shakuni. He managed to tie a speck of rice to one end of a thread and fed it to an ant which took the thread through the hole of the bone. Shakuni survived. He was asked to eat the flesh of his own father which he did and carved set of dice from his bones. After all of them died and only Shakuni was left, he was allowed out of prison on Gandhari's insistence.His plot started then. However, this story is not found in original Mahabharata authored by Vedavyasa.

Some sources say Shakuni had been insulted when his beloved sister has been married to the blind Kuru king Dhritarashtra and swore to destroy the Kaurava clan.

He achieved this by poisoning the mind of his volatile nephew, and influenced Duryodhana into instigating the war with the Pandavas, which resulted in the destruction of the Kauravas. Thus, he is seen by many as the ultimate cause of the destructive Kurukshetra War .

Shakuni is like a rat which destroys cloths by biting in to it, though cloth is not its food. There are some crooked people who would love to do wicked things and enjoy though it doesn't benefit them in any way. Shakuni was such a character. Duryodhana visits Mayasabha a glorious palace build by Maya, the architect of Gods, in Indraprasta, the Kingdom of Pandavas during the Rajasuya. While taking a view of the amazing things around, Duryodhana mistook water for floor and fell in it. The insult that the 'son of blindman can only be blind', got him enraged and Shakuni plotted a clever plan to remove Pandavas from the kingdom. Pandavas were invited to a friendly game of dice against Duryodhana and Shakuni played on his behalf. Shakuni used his skills in the game to good effect, and before Yudhishtira could be persuaded to stop playing, he had already lost all his wealth and kingdom. Yudhishtira knew that he was not equal to Shakuni in dicing and still he ventured to gamble. In the Dice Game, normally there are ten steps of pledging. The game starts from handful of pearls and then it moves on to gold, chariots, elephants, horses, male and female slaves and the army. Shakuni urges Yudhishtira to keep playing. When Yudhishtira loses all wealth, kingdom, his brothers and when himself become the slave of Duryodhana, Shakuni says: 'There is only your precious queen left, and there is also one throw of the dice remaining. Stake her and win yourself all you have lost back with her', Shakuni throws the dice and cries out joyfully, 'We have won'.

Shakuni took Duryodhana's side in the great war at Kurukshetra. He was killed on the battlefield by Sahadeva.

Gurucharan Das, the author of a significant book " The Difficulty of Being Good(page 22)" says : " In 2007 Anil Ambani was the fifth richest person in the world according to the Forbes list of billionaires, but he was consumed with a Duryodhana-like envy for his more accomplished older brother, Mukesh, who was placed a notch higher on the list. Each brother had his Shakuni, who was happy to rig a game of dice in order to with the price and destroy the other Brother.

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